

INN BETWEEN - AUDIO DRAMA SHOWCASE

Show: Sidequesting, Season 3 Episode 2, "Unexpected Magic"

Transcript adapted by Ria Couoh.

INTRO:

HANNAH Hi, everyone! Hannah here, to introduce another one of our friends, the podcast *Sidequesting*.

Sidequesting is the story of an adventurer with a magic sword who will help anyone, provided it doesn't advance the main plot. You might remember our friend Rion from their crossover episode with Castor, Trial by Fire.

See them in their own sidequest in this episode. Enjoy!

UNEXPECTED MAGIC

NARRATION Some days, you wind up further off the path than usual. After passing through a bustling city, I was ready for a little alone time. I like people, I enjoy crowds and parties but - sometimes I'm ready for a walk on my own, too. Sometimes I just let my feet take me where they will. Unfortunately, this time 'where they will' wound up halfway up a mountain and I found myself ... just a little bit lost. Not to worry - sometimes being lost isn't so bad, and I'm sure I'll find my way. There's a city, Arom, not too far off, and they say all roads lead there eventually. As long as this one leads there before I run out of supplies, it's all good.

SFX: BACKGROUND - MOUNTAINOUS AREA, BREEZE, VEGETATION RUSTLING, THE OCCASIONAL BIRD CALL

NARRATION (*continued*)

And there's certainly a lot to look at on my way. The path leads me between boulders and through a sheltered little meadow - there are flowers blooming in colors that I've never seen before -

SFX: STRANGE BUT PLEASANT BIRD CALL

NARRATION (*continued*)

... And I'd have thought I knew the call of every bird across this countryside until now. It all has me so distracted; I almost literally stumble across the first human being I've seen since early that morning! They're kneeling, turned away from me, staring intently at a pool of rainwater that's formed between a few rocks.

AUDIO: A PAUSE.

FINLEY Oh good, you're here. I could use another pair of eyes.

RION You ... knew I was coming?

FINLEY I knew someone was coming, I could tell by the ripples in the water. Here, get down, you don't want them to see you.

SFX: GRASS RUSTLING

RION Who are we hiding from? Are you in danger? Maybe I can help.

FINLEY I wouldn't say danger, I mean they can be quite fierce if threatened, but there is the size differential to consider. As long as we're not swarmed, we'd do all right.

RION I'm not sure how I'd feel fighting someone a lot smaller than myself. Or even the same size, really. I don't feel great fighting at all if I can help it.

FINLEY Good thing I don't mean to fight the dragonwasps, then, only to observe them!

RION Dragon ... wasps?

FINLEY They're quite rare. This is one of the only regions where local flora and fauna in really interesting ways. I'm a naturalist specializing in this sort of thing, which ... tends to lead to a lot of kneeling in various forms of underbrush for various forms of observation.

RION Oh! That does sound interesting. There were definitely flowers back there that were new to me. And I go all sorts of places!

FINLEY Yes, plants are most easily affected by environmental magic - the swooning willow, the limpid tulip, the starshade -

RION I know that one! I helped someone acquire them from a farm.

FINLEY That was you? It was written up in the literature at the time. Good, then you have some experience with unusual environments!

RION I've definitely got that.

FINLEY If you don't mind helping, I could use a research assistant for the day. Someone who could write down some notes and figures while I do the observational bits.

SFX: PAPER RUSTLING

FINLEY I've got spare paper and pen right here, if you're interested? Are you interested? I'm sorry, I ran right into business there without the social introductions. Happens when you spend so much time on your own in the wilderness, I suppose!

I'm Finley, with the Arom Museum of Natural History, at least in a roundabout way. Hello!

RION Rion, I'm pleased to meet you.

And I'd be happy to help you with your research for a while! I'm pretty curious now - I've met a dragon - twice, kind of - but I don't know anything about dragonwasps!

FINLEY Well, Rion, you'll have to let me know when you've had enough! You should never admit to a scientist that you're interested in their field of study.

Dragonwasps are ... quite peculiar and lovely and they inhabit quite a unique evolutionary niche! They have these huge multifaceted eyes, just incredible vision, and elongated bodies that taper down to the stinger - as I said, fierce little beasties - but the particularly interesting aspect is how they communicate!

Their - let's call them scales to simplify things, and that's part of how they got their name - scales on their body can reflect iridescence based on how they move and angle themselves and...

(fading out)

Well, that's how they say hello, or watch out, or there's some prey on the other side of that leaf...

NARRATION Finley tells me all about the dragonwasps - so much! It's really nice, but by the time we get to the research part, my head is absolutely spinning! They keep watching the water while I occasionally take down the time, or the temperature. It's a peaceful way to spend the day, but it's two hours of watching before anything really happens.

SFX: A FAINT HUMMING, AT LEAST TWO DIFFERENT SOURCES BACK AND FORTH BEHIND THE NEXT BIT

FINLEY *(whispering)*

Rion! Stay very still and very quiet.

RION *(similarly)*

Do you want me to write anything down?

FINLEY Not yet. Just ... watch with me.

SFX: THE HUMMING GETS CLOSER, NOT RIGHT UP ON THEM BUT DEFINITELY NEARBY

RION Oh, wow!

FINLEY Wow indeed!

Note the colors - one in shades of green fading into royal blue, the other crimson to gold. It's a mating pair! Do you think you can capture the pattern in which the wings are flashing?

RION I'll try ... maybe if they get closer?

FINLEY Closer is always the problem with these dragonwasps!

Of course, we don't want to provoke any aggressive behaviors, but... luring them somewhere near enough to really verify the angles and shades through which they're communicating... they do sometimes perch on a branch overhanging the water, but no branches here unfortunately, not even anything to extend in their place...

Darn, darn, darn, it's my first chance to observe a pair like this!

RION I might have an idea.

SFX: SLOWLY PULLING THEIR SWORD FROM THE SHEATH

RION Do you think this might work? I could shove the hilt in between the rocks right there, slowly ...

FINLEY What a wonderful idea! Careful ... careful ...

SFX: THE SWORD IS SHOVED INTO PLACE

FINLEY Excellent! Now, we wait and see if they take the opportunity.

(beat)

I must say, it's nice to have some company for the waiting bits. There are so many in this line of work.

RION Look, they're coming over to check it out!

FINLEY Indeed! Stay very still ... but please, keep writing. Quietly.

SFX: THE HUMMING GETS EVEN CLOSER, CONTINUING THROUGH THE NEXT NARRATIVE BIT.

NARRATION The two dragonwasps seem to shimmer in the sunlight, darting back and forth in patterns too complex for me to capture on paper - though I try - and bit by bit, they get curious about the sword extending over the water and dance closer ... and closer...

And as they do, something else unexpected happens!

SFX: ADDED TO THE HUMMING NOW IS A SUBTLE TONE THAT STARTS TO BUILD, INDICATING THE SWORD IS GLOWING.

FINLEY Rion? Rion!

RION Just one moment, I'm trying to... sketch out that pattern...

FINLEY Rion, is it... a usual thing for your sword to glow like that?

RION Wait, what's happening?

SFX: PAPERS FALLING OUT OF RION'S HANDS.

RION That... is not a usual thing. But to be fair, it's not a usual sword.

SFX: BOTH THE HUMMING AND THE GLOWING INCREASE AGAIN.

FINLEY It seems to be... reacting to the iridescence of the dragonwasps! Mimicking them, maybe even... it couldn't be communicating with them? Pure speculation, of course, but...

RION Your guess is as good as mine! Your guess is probably better than mine; I mean, this is what you do.

FINLEY It could be... a sort of sympathetic effect? Not necessarily conscious, but an automatic response to the magic of the - and they certainly seem to like it, I think they're landing, yes, yes... are you getting all this down?

SFX: THE BACKGROUND NOISES FADE OUT AS WE GO BACK INTO NARRATIVE-SPACE.

NARRATION There's an awful lot of writing before the two dragonwasps fly away again. At that point, my sword goes back to normal, too.

I still don't know why that happened - and since it's not Finley's specialty, they can only guess. We sit for a while longer, as much to enjoy the summer afternoon as anything. When the shadows start to deepen, we go back to the meadow and set up camp for the night.

SFX: EVENING DEEPENING, THE SWISH OF GRASS AND FLOWERS AS THEY WALK THROUGH THEM

FINLEY There's a nice patch of grass over on this side where I've spread out the last few nights, and a safe place to build a fire. I may be a bit low on provisions currently, but I'm not bad at foraging.

RION We can do that, while there's light. Also ... how do you feel about trail mix?

NARRATION We forage enough wild vegetables to make a nice stew, supplemented by my trail mix, and settle in by the fire.

Finley is very good company - not quite as intense now, and very interested in hearing stories about my adventures! They have this really musical laugh, I can't hear it enough; it's so much fun entertaining them. And being entertained when they tell me about some of their most exciting research trips, like the time they rescued a swarm of whistlebees from a forest fire in their hat!

SFX: A NICE CAMPFIRE, THE NIGHT HAS DEEPENED.

FINLEY *(enjoying themselves immensely)*

They're called whistlebees, of course, because of this high-pitched noise they make when their wings get going ... so one's hat is not the best place to be carrying them! Oh, the headache I had by the time they were safe!

RION *(laughing)*

Oh, no! Your poor head!

FINLEY And then there was the time I was tracing migration patterns of this type of aquatic mantis... I had to hide underwater and breathe through a reed, I had these goggles so I could see beneath the surface... but I got a bit too involved and a bit too close, and...

(laughing)

I suppose my nose looked too much like the fish they feed on! If you look close, you might notice the notch out of my right nostril.

RION *(you can feel the closeness)*

Yes ... umm, yes, I can see. You don't always wind up damaged on these trips, do you?

FINLEY *(a bit tender, as well)*

I've been all right with the dragonwasps so far. Thanks to your participation, Rion! I'm very glad to have met you today.

RION I am, too. I'm glad I came across your patch of ... unexpected magic.

FINLEY You fit in with it quite nicely.

(beat)

(a bit embarrassed)

Well! It's, umm, getting late, I suppose we should bank the fire and get some sleep. I'm hoping I'll have a chance tomorrow to observe more social behavior. Of the dragonwasps, that is.

(sounding sleepier)

If you want to help, I'd... appreciate that.

RION *(sleepier too)*

Of course, I'd love to help.

SFX: THE FIRE CRACKLING AS THEY ADJUST IT FOR THE NIGHT.

RION Have you noticed any ... larger animals around at night here?

FINLEY Nothing so far ... but in the wilderness of course you never know.

RION I'll keep my sword drawn just ...

(yawns)

Just in case.

FINLEY Yes, that marvelous sword. Thank you, Rion, for everything. Good night.

RION *(fading fast)*

Good night ... Finley.

SFX: THE NIGHT, AND THE FIRE, FADE OUT SLOWLY.

SFX: WE FADE INTO WHAT IS THE DAYTIME BACKGROUND AGAIN, WITH THE FLOWERS FLUTTERING A BIT AND...

SFX: THE DRAGONWASPS HUMMING AGAIN. A LOT OF THEM, THIS TIME, ALL AROUND; PROBABLY A BIT OF THE SWORD GLOWING AS WELL IN THE BACKGROUND.

RION *(half-asleep)*

Aww, please... just one more hour of sleep before I-

(gasps, waking up)

Oh no. Oh, wow. Oh no.

SFX: FOCUSED AGAIN ON THE DRAGONWASPS FOR A FEW MOMENTS, THE HUM SURROUNDING US IN ALL DIRECTIONS.

RION *(whispering)*

Finley? Umm ... Finley?

FINLEY *(slow waking-up sounds, yawns)*

RION Finley!

FINLEY *(still sleepy)*

... honey in the pantry, for the-

(jolts awake)

Rion? What - oh, my. Oh, my.

RION I don't think you'll have trouble finding the dragonwasps today.

FINLEY I... suppose not. I wonder if I can reach my notes without...

SFX: BLANKET SHIFTING, PAPER RUSTLING.

RION I'm fully in favor of science here, just... there are so many of them, very close, and those stingers...

FINLEY Of course. I don't think you need to worry - they don't seem like they're disturbed, or aggressive. The flight patterns, the flashes of light... they're all quite cordial, for the species. Like a big family gathering.

RION I guess that makes us part of the family for now! Do you think it's because of-

FINLEY Your sword again? It is glowing, isn't it? Maybe that's what lured them in!

SFX: FOR ANOTHER MOMENT, WE JUST LISTEN TO THE HUMMING.

FINLEY They're so beautiful, aren't they? Like... slow-motion fireworks

(beat)

I expect if you sheathe your blade, they'll go on their separate ways.

RION I could do that... but you did say you wanted to observe their social behavior! I can wait a bit while you observe them.

FINLEY If you really don't mind?

RION As long as they behave themselves.

FINLEY Don't worry, Rion. I won't let them harm you. Thank you... again. You really are special.

RION *(teasing)*

Or my sword is.

NARRATION So that becomes our morning - and by the end, we both have another story to tell! No one gets stung, Finley fills up both sides of every sheet of paper taking notes; in the end, they've got so much data that they're ready to head back to the city!

I find that I'm ready again too; also, I need help to find my way, since I'm still completely lost on the side of the mountain. We make our way back down together, sharing more stories, making a meal of trail mix and berries while Finley sketches a butterfly and I clean my sword - after all, it spent all night out of the scabbard.

By the time we reach Arom, I'm really sad to think it's time to part ways. Finley is so ... fascinating, brilliant and enthusiastic and so much fun - and the way they were careful with me around the dragonwasps, it's all just...

Okay, all right, I've got a crush! It happens. But now we're coming to the end of our journey and it's gonna be over and... I don't really know how to do this.

What do you say when...? And then before I can figure out and say it, we're through the gates and into one of the main squares! The trip is over.

SFX: MEDIEVAL CITY BACKGROUND.

FINLEY We made it! Arom, sweet Arom. I do miss it when I'm away.

RION And this time you've made it undamaged.

FINLEY Well, I had such a companion! We ... took good care, umm, of each other.

RION We do make an excellent team.

FINLEY Thank you so much ... for the notetaking, and the company, and the ... assistance through magical properties ...

RION My sword is always at your service.

FINLEY As is my museum! You really should let me show you around the galleries some time. But I ... didn't just mean your sword, Rion. That sword, while quite intriguing, is the least of your special properties.

RION Oh. Aww. Thank you. I was kinda showing off, with the sword.

FINLEY Well, I was showing off with all those stories! Whisperbees, who even are you, Finley? What is your life?

RION I was showing off with my stories too.

FINLEY I guess I should let you go ... somewhere, someone surely needs your help.

RION Actually... I'd like to stick around a while. Would it be ... okay, maybe ... to take you out to dinner?

FINLEY Really?

RION Or lunch! Or any meal you want. I just ... I like you, I'd like to spend more time with you.

FINLEY I'd really enjoy that. A meal, or the museum, or - there's a really great library in Circle Square, listen to me, "let's go on a library date." You... did mean a date, right? That's what we're doing?

RION That's what we're doing. If you want to.

FINLEY Yes. Yes, please. How... unexpected. I don't, usually ... I don't get a lot of attention in the city.

RION I would have paid attention to you anywhere.

FINLEY Well! Maybe come back with me while I drop off my notes, and ... we'll sort out our next adventure from there?

RION Sounds like a plan!

SOUND: THEY WALK AWAY TOGETHER.

RION Oh - just so you know, in case... of things... I'm ace.

FINLEY Duly noted! Twig insects are too, you know. That reminds me of a time out in the field...

RION Oh, now I'm another research subject to you?

FINLEY No. Oh, no! I was just... my mind goes in... ways, you know.

RION I'm teasing. Can I give you a hug?

FINLEY Yes, we should absolutely hug.

NARRATION And then we hugged and went on to have a lovely day. The exhibits in the Museum of Natural History are really enthralling ... and so is Finley. I know I'll be off on another adventure soon ... but I'm sure I'll come back this way again. After all, this is the kind of magic you don't find all that often.

CREDITS:

TAL Thank you for Sidequesting with us!

This episode, Unexpected Magic, was written by DJ Sylvis and produced by Tal Minear.

Finley was voiced by Newton Schottelkotte. The voice of Rion was Tal Minear.

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EPISODE ENDS.